

# ORM NEWS

From the Office of the Deputy Assistant  
Secretary for Resolution Management  
Department of Veterans Affairs



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May 2002

## *From the Deputy Assistant Secretary*



I just received a very complimentary letter from a VAMC director regarding an ADR/Mediation presentation by one of your colleague's. Getting complimentary mail about the work of ORM employees is not uncommon. This one just happened to reach me soon after I had emphasized the value of prevention and early resolution in a presentation to VHA's National Leadership Board.

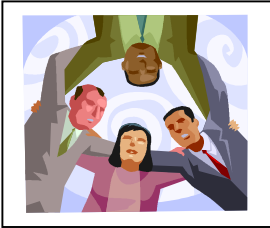
I encourage you to continue your efforts to help disputants reach early resolution to their issues through mediation because resolution by the disputants, themselves, is usually much better, longer lasting, and far less costly to our organization than decisions made by outside parties.

ADR/Mediation is a very valuable tool. You have been an integral part of or have seen the successful use of this tool in reaching early resolution in disputes. Let's continue our efforts to get more complainants and RMO's to understand the value and the use of this process. Please don't hesitate to share your thoughts on how we can help increase understanding the value of, and use of this early resolution tool.

/s/

James S. Jones

# Highlights of Regulations and Programs



## FEDERAL AGENCIES LAUNCH JOINT MEDIATION INITIATIVE

EEOC and Postal Service Enter First-Ever Partnership on Alternative Dispute Resolution

**WASHINGTON** - Cari M. Dominguez, Chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), today announced the implementation of an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) program with the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) to improve the processing of discrimination complaints by Postal workers nationwide. Under the initiative, virtually all requests for hearings before EEOC administrative judges involving bias cases against the Postal Service will first go through mediation.

"I am enthusiastic about this innovative partnership," said Chair Dominguez. "This is a creative use of a powerful tool - mediation - to settle differences in a timely, cost-effective, and mutually satisfactory way. Introducing mediation at this stage of the process is a win-win."

Anthony J. Vegliante, Vice President for Labor Relations at the U.S. Postal Service, said: "Mediation at the hearing stage provides another opportunity to empower parties to a dispute to recognize each other's points of view and to be recognized. Working with the EEOC on this initiative is something that we do gladly and with a commitment to further improve our process for the benefit of all our employees."

Under the nationwide program, EEOC administrative judges will issue a Mediation Order to the parties and provide a copy to the local USPS ADR coordinator. Receipt of the Mediation Order will serve to notify the Postal Service ADR staff of the need to schedule the case for mediation. USPS will provide an expert external mediator to conduct the mediation session, which will typically be completed within 90 days of issuance of the Mediation Order. The role of the mediator is to facilitate discussions and assist the parties in resolving the dispute.

Reaching an agreement is strictly voluntary on the part of participants. The mediator has no authority to mandate a resolution of the case and will inform the EEOC administrative judge of the outcome within 10 days of the mediation, as well as provide a copy of any resulting settlement agreement. If a mediated resolution is not reached, an EEOC administrative judge will proceed to process the complaint in accordance with the federal sector regulations (29 C.F.R. Part 1614).

Cases that will be excluded from the program include class and systemic complaints, those involving Equal Pay Act claims, and cases involving conduct by the complainant of a criminal nature (such as Postal Service "inspector" cases).

In addition, in rare circumstances, EEOC administrative judges may determine that good cause exists for not requiring the parties to participate in mediation. The program has already been phased into EEOC field office hearing units in Florida, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Indiana, and parts of Texas. Full implementation at all EEOC field offices nationwide is expected by January 2003. EEOC projects that approximately 3,500 complaints per year against USPS will be processed through the mediation program once fully implemented.

*(Excerpt from an EEOC news release dated March 28, 2002)*

## EEOC Creates ADR Web Page

The EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) has created a Web page with information on the federal alternative dispute resolution process, ranging from frequently asked questions about the program to the types of ADR techniques agencies use to handle discrimination complaints to.

“This new federal sector ADR Web page will serve as a valuable online resource for federal managers, employees and applicants alike,” said EEOC Chair Cari Dominguez. “It will assist federal agencies in implementing and improving their internal ADR programs.” Go to <http://www.eeoc.gov/federal/adr/index.html> for more information.



## What is the Plain Language Initiative?

The Plain Language Initiative requires the use of plain language in all new documents written for the public that explain how to obtain a benefit or service or how to comply with a requirement. By Jan. 1, 2002, everything the federal government publishes must conform to this requirement. Plain language is a style that requires the writer to focus on what the reader needs to know, rather than what the writer wants to say. (Correction: It is a style of writing that requires a focus on what you need to know, not what I want to say. Yes —the use of personal pronouns is not only allowed but also preferred!)

For most of us this initiative will require that we "unlearn" many writing techniques that have become habitual. We will need to form new habits such as: writing in the active instead of the passive voice (for example, "Kirschstein decided that..." rather than, "It was decided that..."); using common, everyday words instead of words we need a thesaurus to find; shortening our sentences; making more use of lists, tables, graphics and "white space"; and using the "question and answer" format to organize material around the interest of the reader. These techniques are but a sampling of a way of writing that simply makes sense. To find out more about how to write in plain language, visit the National Partnership for Reinventing Government Web site at [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov).

# VA National Leaders' Conference Addressess the Future

The Department of Veterans Affairs will hold a National Leaders' Conference in Atlanta, Georgia from July 15, 2002, to July 18, 2002.

The theme of the conference is: **“Shaping the Future: Cultivating a Dynamic and Dedicated Workforce Through Excellence in Human Resources, Diversity and EEO Practices.”**

The Offices of Human Resources and Management, Diversity Management and EEO, and Resolution Management, all part of Human Resources and Administration, are sponsoring the conference.

The audience will include executives from the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration and National Cemetery Administration, as well as the Office of Employment Discrimination Adjudication, General Counsel, Regional Counsels, Human Resource Directors, EEO Professionals and Alternative Dispute Resolution Coordinators.

This conference has been created to discuss the challenges VA leaders are experiencing in the areas of diversity, human resources and equal employment opportunity, and to provide these leaders with tools to deal more effectively with conflict and diversity issues in the workplace. More specifically, the conference has been designed to help executives re-channel negative instances of workplace grievances into positive utilization's of agency resources to enable employees to provide the best possible service to our nation's veterans and their families.

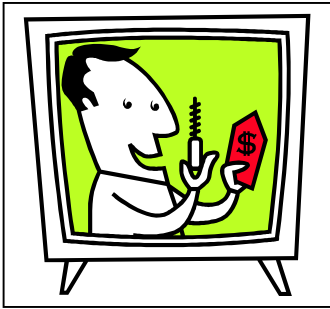
Both government and private sector speakers have committed to address this leadership conference. Agenda topics have been formulated from all three areas of human resources, diversity and EEO. The following are examples of topics to be presented: Intercultural Mediation: Recruiting the Best in VA, Implementing Succession Planning, Underlying Root Causes of EEO Complaints, Flexibilities in Human Resources, Detecting Discrimination Early, The Cost of Not Providing Reasonable Accommodations, Making Alternative Dispute Resolution Programs more Effective, Creating a Positive Workforce Environment, The Youth of VA Speak Out on Diversity and Valuing VA's Human Capital, Leading to a Results Oriented Workforce.

The VA is the second largest agency in the U.S. Government next to the Department of Defense. Our services potentially affect the lives of 28 million veterans and their families.

Additional information on the conference is available at  
<http://www.national-leaders-conference.org>

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# What Makes a Good Spokesperson?



*(The following is an excerpt from an article by media trainer Karen Friedman in which she creates the acronym **BEAGOODSPOKESPERSON**. This article is taken from the March 2002, VA Public Affairs Report.)*

**W**hile a spokesperson that has experience inside a news organization or political campaign is probably better equipped to deal with pressure and deadlines, it is not a prerequisite for the job. All spokespeople however, regardless of past experience should be able to put the following tips into play:

**B**elieve in what you're saying.

**E**liminate industry jargon if you're not talking to an industry audience.

**A**ttitude creates a lasting impression.

**G**ive sincere and honest answers. If you don't know, say so.

**O**pinions don't count. Be able to back up statements with facts.

**O**ff the record is not advised.

**D**eliver clear concise messages in terms audiences can relate to and understand.

**S**how care and concern during difficult situations.

**P**ut your audience first and provide information from their viewpoint.

**O**nly provide information that is confirmed.

**K**now what you want to say in advance and deliver that message regardless of what questions you are asked.

**E**xamples, anecdotes, visual images, stories and metaphors make your message memorable.

**S**how energy and enthusiasm.

**P**roactive is better than reactive. Don't wait for someone to come to you.

**E**asily accessible and available.

**R**emember not to lie or speculate.

**S**mile when appropriate so people think you want to be there.

**O**wn what you say and give it meaning.

**N**ever say "No Comment" even if you have nothing to say.

*Source "Crisis Manager" ezine by Jonathan Bernstein  
Bernstein Communications, Inc., <http://www.bernsteincom.com>.*

# Notes from the Field

## Cleveland Field Office

[Tamarlin Barner](#), Administrative Officer, was a co-facilitator, along with the Cleveland EEO Program Manager, for a VISN New Supervisory Training EEO Program at the Wyndam Hotel, Downtown Cleveland, on April 8.

[Thurman Story](#), EEO Intake Specialist, and [Bettye Brown](#), EEO Counselor, provided EEO Training at the Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center in Saginaw, Michigan for approximately 80 supervisors/managers, and employees during the week of 4/22-26, 2002.

## Leavenworth Field Office

On April 10, 2002, [Charlotte Jones](#), Field Manager, spoke to the KC Federal Executive Board (FEB) mediators. Ms. Jones presented the topic of EEO laws and regulations. She also provided helpful tips on effective and enforceable settlement agreements. Her presentation was well received by the group.

The Greater Kansas City Federal Executive Board (KC FEB) recently announced that [Charlotte Jones](#) has become a member of the KC FEB.

[Hwa-soon \(Sue\) Thorson](#), a team leader and C-2, has been certified as a primary mediator by the KC Federal Executive Board Shared Neutrals Program.

## Bay Pines Field Office

Congratulations to [Winston Johnson](#) and [John Mitchell](#), EEO Counselors, they were both selected for EEO Investigator positions. Their promotions were effective April 21, 2002.

### Washington Field Office

[Donald Ballard](#), EEO Counselor, was promoted to the position of EEO Investigator, effective April 7, 2002.

[Cheryl Campbell](#), EEO Investigator, recently completed the EEO Investigator Course held in Clear Water, FL.

[Henry \(Buddy\) Sapp](#), EEO Intake Specialist, conducted Managers Training at Clarksburg, TN,

[Donald Ballard](#), EEO Investigator, participated in the Position Standards and Position Description Work Group held in Bay Pines, FL. in April.

On March 28, 2002, [Vanessa Deal](#) and [Veronica Snowden](#) (Washington Field Office) along with [Ernestine Richardson](#) (Office of Policy and Compliance) were recognized for their military service during Women's History Month ceremonies at VA Central Office.

### Vancouver Field Office

There are two new EEO Managers at VA facilities we serve that we wish to welcome. The first is [Grallin Butler](#) from the Puget Sound Health Care System. The second is [Sherri Baird](#) from the White City Domiciliary.

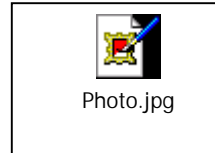
### Little Rock Field Office

The Office of Resolution Management, Little Rock, would like to welcome new employee, [Kenneth Gipson](#), EEO Counselor Trainee, to their office. Mr. Gipson reported for duty on April 22, 2002.

Senior Airman [Jeff Parks](#), son of [Charlotte Barr](#), EEO Counselor, was recently deployed to the country of Oman in the Middle East. We wish him well and a safe return.

### Hines Field Office

The Hines Field Office has "adopted" a family. The five children (ages 6 months - 8 years) and their mother visited our office at Easter time and we presented them with a big, beautiful Easter basket filled with toys, books, candy, etc. We look forward to spending more time with our new family. Click here to see a photo



The Hines Field Office celebrated "Bring your daughter to work day" (April 25, 2002) with lunch, ice cream, goodies and activities for the children. We put the older kids to work, training them to be future ORM employees, while the younger children enjoyed playing with each other. Now we just need to convince them it's not always fun and games at the office!

Congratulations - [Renita Clay](#), EEO Assistant, was the Hines ORM Field Office employee of the month. Ms Clay has been instrumental in assuring that the Hines Field Office maintains a 100% accurate case count each month. She also goes the extra mile to verify the Web-Based Tracking System matches the actual files on hand.

Congratulations - [Ida O'Neal](#), EEO Investigator, received the first Customer Service Certificate of Recognition from the Hines ORM Field Office. She was provided this certificate for receiving a letter from a Complainant thanking her for an "impressively thorough investigation." The Complainant wrote, "I was quite impressed by her ability to work with management officials and myself to find a solution that met the needs of both parties...She went the extra mile."

Ms. [Joyce Herron](#), EEO Counselor, was presented with her pin for 20 years of federal service.

### Lyons Field Office

[Carolyn Wakefield](#) (P&C), [Marilyn Adamson](#) (Washington), [Linda Buffer](#) (Houston) and [Jack Frost](#) (Leavenworth) conducted a Basic Investigator Course on April 22 through 26, 2002 in beautiful Clearwater Beach, Florida. Rosa Franco (Lyons), who leads the cadre of



trainers for this course, also was present supporting the trainers and providing a management perspective to course discussions.

The ORM Workgroup for Investigators developed the Basic Investigator Course approximately 2 years ago. The class contains lectures, role-plays, and writing assignments all intertwined with some creative learning through play and class participation. Recently the course went through some minor renovations to make it easier for the facilitators to follow and to ensure that the information being provided is up-to-date.

Comments received from some of the participants were very supportive of the course and the instructors. [John Mitchell](#) (Bay Pines) stated that the course was, "one of the best training sessions I ever attended both in and out of the VA." He stated that the instructors were "innovative" and gave new meaning to the phrase class participation.

[Ivette Garcia-Bradford](#) (Lyons) stated that she had attended the first ORM training in Hunt Valley, MD, and was attending this course as a refresher. She found this course to be "very informative" and "up-to-date." She stated that this course tested your knowledge in fun and interactive ways.

[Dawn Arps](#) (Hines) brought a Counselor's prospective to the class. She complimented the proper class size and noted that she enjoyed the variety of EEO positions that were represented in the class. She stated that she now has a better "understanding of the information that Intakes and Investigators need me to provide in my report as a guide in the acceptability and investigation process."

[Laura Walcott](#) (Lyons), [Wardelle McClendon](#) (Lyons) and [Fred Kroog](#) (Lyons) are new investigators that came to ORM from the US Post Office. They commented on the "knowledgeable instructors" who were available, even after class, to assist the participants. They also found all the materials and manuals that were provided to be informative and helpful. Fred also commented on use of the games as a different way of teaching " that caused you to remember the information."

[Vernet Fraser](#) (P&C) expressed some of the same thoughts. He added that the class "reinforced" the knowledge he already had

regarding investigations by having “maximum participation from the students and the instructors.”

**Cheryl Campbell** (Washington) also comes to ORM from another Federal agency. She stated that the class, “was a great opportunity to meet employees from other Field Offices and share ideas. ” She added that the class was informative and was kept on a “basic” level. ” She and the other participants noted that the only downside was the nightly homework.

Congratulations to the team for a job well done and the best of luck to all the class participants.

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# Did You Know?



## **U.S. Savings Bond Campaign** **May 1 – May 31**

Buying Savings Bonds through your Payroll Savings Plan is the safe and easy way to save money. When you sign up you'll be joining the over 55 million Americans taking advantage of Savings Bonds' competitive rates. Whether you select Treasury's I Bond (new) or Series EE Bond, your money is guaranteed to grow and be there for your future needs.

For more information on Savings Bonds click on [www.savingsbonds.gov](http://www.savingsbonds.gov)  
or call **1 800 4US Bond**

## Public Service Recognition Week

### May 6 –May 12

Since 1985, this event has been celebrated the first full week in May ... a time set aside to educate Americans about the broad variety of services provided by government. The week is also an opportunity to show appreciation to public employees at the federal, state, and local levels who ensure that our government is the best in the world.

## Memorial Day

### May 27



# Reminders:

**ORM NEWS** is a monthly publication of the Office of Resolution Management. Please E-mail Terry Washington, External Affairs Program Analyst or Tyrone Eddins, External Affairs Program Manager, to submit your recommendations, suggestions, or comments on the information presented in this newsletter. We can be reached at (202) 501-2800. Back copies of the newsletter can be found on ORM's Web site at <http://www.va.gov/orm/NewsEvents.htm>.

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